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A D D R E S S

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Hon. Henry Breckinridge

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ADDRESS

OF

Hon. Henry Breckinridge

Assistant Secretary of War

IN THE
ACCEPTANCE OF

The Equestrian Statue

OF

Major-General John Sedgwick.



GETTYSBURG PENNA

June 19 1913

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YOUR EXCELLENCY: It is indeed an honor and pleasure for me to accept, on behalf of the War Department, the splendid memorial of Major-General John Sedgwick, provided by the State of Connecticut.

It is good for a people to make tangible expression of their appreciation of the sacrifice of heroes in behalf of the public weal. It is fitting to erect lasting monuments to the memory of noble patriots for an eternal reminder to coming generations of what qualities are required if a nation is to endure.

Righteousness, not gold, exalteth a nation. Not the pomp and pride and outward circumstance of power, but the steel and truth of the individual character bring safety in storm and stress. Not the gleam and glitter of splendid equipage, or the sparkle of rare jewel worn to adorn a beautiful woman spell the true wellbeing of the country; but in the honesty, uprightness, self-respect and wellbeing of the common man, and in the purity, fidelity, and good condition of the common woman is treasured the true foundation of the nation's greatness. The body is more than raiment; the mind is more than the body, and the spirit is more than all. We love John Sedgwick for the spirit that was in him and we glory the more in his greatness

because he was peculiarly endowed with the virtues upon which depend the lasting greatness of the Republic.

First, he was submissive to the discipline of religion and in time of spiritual tribulation was wont to resort for comfort and strength to the infinite resources of the living God. In writing to his father and mother after the death of his sister Olive he said, "How little we know what God's purposes are concerning us! You and mother, I know, are supported and comforted by the consolation of knowing that you have entrusted your all into His hands." And later in the same letter, "Poor Emily, how desolate she must feel, and Mr. Fuller too; but they both have faith and confidence in the love of the Saviour." These words were written in John Sedgwick's forty-third year and exhibit the tested faith of a full developed manhood. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." For the best interpretation of a man's life and practice seek out and learn the faith that is in him.

Coupled with his religious faith was a deep rooted love of home and family. In the same letter from which I have already quoted he said, "It is a great consolation to believe that wherever I may die I shall be buried near my family." Again, a short half year before the outbreak of our Civil War, we find him writing home to provide for retaining the old family pew—"the one our father and mother always occupied." His letters to his sister Emily were constant and to them we are indebted for the most illuminating exposition of his private character. He loved his family with an intense love and through these letters constantly showered upon them the most unreserved expressions of affection and consideration. In the midst of cruel war his mind was ever turning home and his yearning found vent in the expression

of the unfulfilled intention that "If this war is ever terminated I intend now to leave the service and live a quiet and, I hope, a happy life at my old home."

To a strong religious faith and love of home John Sedgwick added the virtue of modesty. The man who led the Greek Cross of the 6th Corps to undying fame expressed in 1862 the fear that the command of 13,000 men was above his capacity. And, again, when it seemed that Sedgwick could have had command of the Army of the Potomac by simply stretching forth his hand, he would not make the move. Whether or not it would have been for the advantage of the Union cause for him to have taken this command is not for us to say. Suffice it that we truly appreciate the self-abnegation of one who subordinated ambition and self to what he thought to be the best interest of his country. And, Oh! how loyal he was. When McClellan began to lose favor Sedgwick stood back of him like a rock, saying "I mean to stand or fall with McClellan. He has been very kind to me, giving me a large command without my asking for it, and I am afraid too large for my deserts, and I believe they are determined to crush him."

Modest in his estimate of his own deserts, so was he generous in praise of his subordinates—always heartily commending their worthy deeds and pressing their claims for advancement.

Generous, loyal, modest, genial, home-loving, affectionate—no wonder that John Sedgwick gripped men to him by the steely bands of love. Had he never found in war's havoc the setting for an enduring glory, the loveliness and truth of his private character would have created a lasting tradition among those with whom he came in contact.

To do justice to the military career of General Sedgwick, I will not attempt today. The mere reading

of his military record sounds like a roster of world famous battles. Disregarding minor operations against the Indians before and after the Mexican War, we read the Siege of Vera Cruz; Cerro Gordo; Amazoque; San Antonio; Churubusco, where he was brevetted Captain for gallantry; Molino del Rey; Chapultepec, where again brevetted Major for gallantry, and the capture of Mexico City. Then came an interval of quasi peace, disturbed by Indian fights and border disturbances in Kansas. Now Fort Sumter sounds the call to resume the record already noteworthy: In the defences of Washington to August, 1861, Assistant Inspector General; Brigade Commander; Division Commander guarding the Potomac; Division Commander in Virginia Peninsular Campaign; Siege of Yorktown; Fair Oaks; Peach Orchard; Savage's Station; Glendale, where he was wounded; Northern Virginia Campaign on the retreat from Bull Run to Washington; Maryland Campaign; Antietam, where he was thrice wounded; the Rappahannock Campaign; Storming of Marye Heights; Salem; Gettysburg; Rapidan; Rappahannock Station; Mine Run, the Wilderness and Spottsylvania—always in the van of the battle; ever the special dependence of his superiors; calm; knowing no fear; prompt; cool; determined; never faltering. Why he was not killed a hundred times before only the God of Battles can reply. Why he was not spared to see the cause he fought for succeed only the God of Battles fully knows.

We stand upon a battlefield significant for all time in the history of the world. With Marathon and Tours and Waterloo the fame of Gettysburg will endure as long as man is interested in his own condition, for here it was decided that the nation holding more of hope for mankind than any that had trod the earth since Israel walked in union with Jehovah was

not to be disrupted by the throes of civil convulsion. When Vicksburg fell and Lee recoiled from Gettysburg, the cause of the Confederacy was doomed. Every general who led troops on this field has written his name forever in the hall of fame. The name of every man who fought here, whether he rank as private or general, should be cherished with patriotic reverence down the generations of his descendants.

Many of you remember the fatigue and agony of that night march to the battle—the summons from Meade received at 9 o'clock, after a hard day of marching and work—already wearied at the start; the iron will of Sedgwick pushing the column. The intense heat of that July night, the dust, the sweat, the bleeding feet, the head seeming about to burst, but no faltering, no stopping. The order from Meade is peremptory—the fate of the Union may depend upon the timely arrival of the 6th Corps. Better a few killed by marching than an army destroyed. It does not seem that human flesh and human spirit can stand the strain. Thirty-six miles in 17 hours. The sounds of the battle are heard; the booming of the cannon and the rattle of the musketry speak the dire need for the 6th Corps. The line of battle is approached; brigades are detached hither and yon to the support of the suffering Union lines. Brigade after brigade is sent off by the General till finally he virtually is without a command. He has accomplished his task—he has led one of the famous marches of all time and by his indomitable will, unfaltering courage and the heroic devotion of his men, has clinched the victory and perhaps saved the life of his country.

Less than a year later the soul of John Sedgwick was sped to God by a bullet. Heaven was enriched by another pure spirit; mankind, though bereaved, was left a high example.

When the threat of foreign foe perturbs the nation, or the violence of internal anarchy would convulse us, or the lust of greed oppress us, or the sins of immoral luxury undermine us, give us men like Sedgwick, seeking not their own but their country's; ready to die for conscience sake. Woe be to the nation that forgets her heroes. Keep green the memory of our martyrs; teach the young the great deeds of their forbears; kindle the torch of patriotism with the fire of zeal and devotion. Hold to the things that are good. Preserve the simplicity and liberty of our political life and, under God, our country will survive the centuries in an ever continuing increase of greatness and justice.

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